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## Digital Learning Advisory Council

### Meeting Minutes

July 29, 2021

### Attendees

- Nick Caruso — Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE)
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Larry Covino — Bristol Adult Education
- Josh Elliott — Fairfield University
- Andy DePalma — EASTCONN
- Barbara Johnson — Connecticut Educators Computer Association (CECA) and Coventry Public Schools
- Karen Kaplan — Hamden Public Schools
- Greg Mcverry — Southern Connecticut State University
- Jim Mindek — Connecticut Technical High School System
- Chinma Uche — CREC Aerospace Academy & CT CS Teachers Association
- Scott Zak — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

### Agenda

- Thought Exchange Preliminary Responses to the Following Prompt:

What about technology use during the pandemic is worth keeping as we return to in-person education?

- Open Education Resources Site Updates
- Legislative Session Highlights
  - Model Curriculum ([PA 21-2, p. 591](#))
  - Study on Remote Learning ([PA 21-2, p. 604](#))
  - Expansion of Commission Membership ([PA 21-76, p. 36](#))
- Reminders
  - Promote Thought Exchange at [bit.ly/3AKZE79](https://bit.ly/3AKZE79)
  - Emergency Connectivity Fund Filing Ends August 13

### Welcome

Nick Caruso, Chair of the Digital Learning Advisory Council, called the meeting to order just after 10:00 AM. He thanked members for attending during either their summer break or in preparation for the start of the school year. He invited Doug Casey to introduce the first topic, regarding a statewide survey to collect feedback on the digital learning



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practices that the education community adopted during the pandemic and that they felt should continue.

### **Thought Exchange**

The statewide survey through the Thought Exchange platform launched on July 8, allowing individuals to respond to the following prompt:

**What about technology use during the pandemic is worth keeping as we return to in-person education?**

Nick reminded members that responses to the survey should help the Commission to develop educational technology policy recommendations for the Connecticut General Assembly. He encouraged all members of the education community to share their ideas and rank those of other contributors by visiting <https://tejoin.com/824683559>.

Based on the preliminary report provided by Jonathan Costa of EdAdvance, only 135 individuals had responded, offering 130 suggestions and providing more than 1,000 ratings of ideas from fellow respondents. Doug provided a form letter to leaders of educational institutions and organizations a week prior to the survey launch. That letter included sample outreach language to encourage participation by students, parents, teachers, and other members of the education community.

Advisory Council members agreed that extending the response period and continuing outreach efforts should help increase the number of responses. Several noted that summer may not be an ideal time to conduct a survey. Many teachers, leaders, parents, and students have experienced "burnout" from online activities.

Common themes among the suggestions collected so far include the following:

- Use of technology to support remote learning during inclement weather days
- Ability to experiment with technology for teaching and learning
- Ongoing use of technology for virtual parent – teacher meetings
- Investing time and training into fully leveraging the suite of Google education tools
- Continued investments in home broadband and devices to keep students connected and engaged
- Continuing access to platforms for creating and sharing curriculum materials and digital materials

Advisory Council members noted that many districts and universities are conducting similar data-collection efforts to identify best practices. Barbara Johnson of Colchester indicated that her district has asked staff and students for their input on what worked well during remote learning. Doug shared the University of Connecticut has similar efforts underway. Karen Kaplan asked if the Council or Commission might look to



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collect and create a crosswalk of district survey results. She, Andy DePalma, and Jim Mindek expressed a need to move beyond collecting input to putting best practices in place. Andy suggested that leadership organizations within the state, including CECA and the Connecticut Association of School Librarians (CASL), might help move this work forward. Barbara Johnson noted that the CECA-CASL conference is scheduled to take place in October 2022 (next year) in a blended online and in-person format. In the short term, Nick suggested that the Commission might consider a press conference to share the findings of the survey to encourage further dialog and adoption of promising practices.

Karen suggested a redesign of the survey, replacing a single, open-ended prompt with multiple, specific questions about teaching and learning in order to elicit more actionable responses. Chinma Uche agreed and noted that to date, most respondents have been K – 12 teachers. She expressed concern that schools would be returning to past instructional approaches this fall rather than leveraging ways to use technology to personalize learning for students. For example, she encouraged the use of online platforms to increase the number of students who can take advanced placement computer science. Nick observed that collecting feedback only from educators and leaders might skew the pool of suggestions only to those that benefit adults rather than students, many of whom did not engage with the remote learning offerings of their districts and colleges.

### **Open Education Resources**

The launch of Go Open CT ([www.GoOpenCT.org](http://www.GoOpenCT.org)) will take place in the early fall, and Doug shared some updates on the site development. He reminded Advisory Council members that the Commission has undertaken this work to provide a platform for schools and universities to create, share, and curate high-quality, standards-aligned, and free learning materials such as lesson plans, unit plans, and even full textbooks. The site has gone through beta review, with plans in place to train administrators on its many uses, then roll out the site to teachers and professors. Doug shared that this approach would help ensure that leaders have time to understand the site's capabilities, consider how they may wish to use its toolset, and then put together local plans for its use among educators. A tiered rollout would also afford the opportunity to develop and share case studies, tutorials, and awareness messaging for the education community. Kevin Corcoran welcomed plans to continue offering training and outbound communications into the fall.

Several members of the group highlighted opportunities to upload and share materials through the site. Kevin chairs the statewide OER Coordinating Council, which has awarded grants for the past two years to support the review and development of open materials. He noted that starting in the third year, grant recipients will have to upload their materials to Go Open CT. Doug also noted that the Connecticut Association of School Librarians (CASL) will be indexing its collection of instructional videos to access via the site. He also noted that the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)



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will use Go Open CT as the platform for posting statewide curriculum. Jim expressed interest in the site on behalf of the Technical High School System (CTHS), and Nick suggested bringing Bob Trefry into the conversation, given his role on the State Board of Education, CTHS Board, and CAFE Board.

### **Legislative Session Highlights**

Doug opened the last topic of the meeting by highlighting the reinstatement of four Commission seats through [Public Act 21-76](#). Commission members had called for these positions to ensure a strong representation of teachers and education leaders in decision making. Appointments will come from the American Federation of Teachers – Connecticut, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, the Connecticut Education Association, and the Connecticut Educators Computer Association.

Advisory Council members also discussed aspects of the budget implementer, Public Act 21-2, including the directive in [Section 374](#) for the CSDE to develop model curriculum for grades K – 8. Karen noted progress to date, including a common Algebra I course and suggested that materials from that course be included on Go Open CT. The implementer also calls for the creation of a Commission for Remote Learning to study the impact of distance education over the past year as well as the feasibility of creating a statewide remote learning school (see [Section 387](#)). Greg also shared highlights of [Public Act 21-59](#), An Act Concerning Data Privacy Breaches, with accountability measures defined for private entities that collect and store data from Connecticut residents.

### **Adjournment**

Nick thanked the Advisory Council members for their time and insights. He encouraged members to reach out to him or any member of the Commission with ideas or concerns tied to digital learning. He concluded the meeting at approximately 11:30 AM.